



# The evolutionary trends of international entrepreneurship in the past two decades: The state of the field in the face of COVID-19's global crisis

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The field of international entrepreneurship (IE) has accomplished a highly significant progress in the past three decades. A handful of articles were introduced in the decade of the 1980s and a few seminal articles formally introduced the birth of the newly emerging field of IE to the scholarly community early in the decade of the 1990s (e.g., McDougall et al. 1994, Oviatt and McDougall 1994), and an accelerated development followed, which reflected the true state of practice and scholarship then (e.g., Etemad 2004, 1999a, 1999b, Etemad and Lee 2003, Dana et al. 1999). The practically side of the young field experienced rapid growth as smaller firms such as born globals (Knight and Cavusgil 2004) the International New Ventures (INVs) (Oviatt and McDougall 1994) and rapidly internationalizing enterprises (RIEs or RIFs) (Etemad 2007; Etemad and Wu 2013; Keen and Etemad 2012a, b, 2011), expanded internationally at a high pace. The young scholarly field began to observe, learn, and further address the managerial, practical, and policy aspects of entrepreneurial internationalization, beyond those restricted to academic and scholarly research and publications. Understanding the nature of entrepreneurial internationalization, the *combining related aspects of entrepreneurship and international business (IB) initially*, and the lesson of affiliated, or complementary, fields enriching the young field later on did not take too long, mainly due to the use of relevant concepts and strategies of other allied fields by SMEs and internationalizing SMEs (iSMEs) over the years. These accelerated developments expedited the evolutionary pace of IE. As a result, IE's orientation transformed into a highly functional as well as a multi-disciplinary scholarly field and held the promise of learning from the state-of-the-art of other field's advances and lessons of the prevailing practice with minor delays.

It is noteworthy that the very first narrowly focused session presenting the early foundations of, and the need for, research in international entrepreneurship consisted

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of a panel discussion of four IE scholars in the annual Academy of International Business (AIB) conference in the late 1990s. Before the end of that sessions, participants strongly and unanimously voiced a strong need for having highly focused discussions sessions, programs, and even dedicated conferences on IE soon to enable the meetings of the minds and dissemination of research results on the one hand and *pointing out existing gaps for further research and publications* on the other hand.

*Retrospectively, this process of learning from and reporting on contemporary issues, or phenomenon, and identifying topics in need of further research became the guiding torch, lighting the way for early developments in the young field, which has continued over time.* Consequently, the first McGill International Entrepreneurship Conference (MIEC) saw and responded to the declared need. It was held soon thereafter at McGill University in September 1998. It invited nearly all the interested scholars of the emerging field and those who had interest in the topic. One of the subjects that occupied the invitees earlier on in that inaugural conference was whether international entrepreneurship was a subfield, or a field, and if it could become a full-fledged field of its own soon? After holding the 24 McGill International Entrepreneurship conferences, in 2019, that question is mute and far behind us now.<sup>1</sup> However, the valuable lesson of careful scanning the environment or contemporary practice(s) for identifying a new phenomenon and addressing it has been adopted widely and endured overtime.<sup>2</sup> As a result, international entrepreneurship has established itself as a strong scholarly field with the scholars of its own performing focused, rich, and specialized research anchored in both the theory and practice. They are presented in prominent national and international conferences and also published in equally prominent referred journals to push the field's frontiers forward.

The need for a dedicated journal became apparent earlier on, and the Journal of International Entrepreneurship (JIEN) was formally established in 2001. The journal has successfully published cutting-edge articles in its 18 annual volumes already, and this Springer issue of JIEN's 19th annual volumes celebrates the second quarterly issue of 2021. Their publications have been highly rewarding for the journal and its publisher, the Springer Nature.

Although the journal of international entrepreneurship has provided a dedicated venue for publication of research in the field's development, the rich and rapid evolution of the field has been carried on the shoulders of international entrepreneurship scholars, and the 11 authors and co-authors of this issue are a typical sample of dedicated scholarship in this growing field. Similar to the Springer issue of volume 18, released in May to June 2020, this issue also coincides with, and faces, the difficult conditions of COVID-19 global pandemic,<sup>3</sup> which have challenged many

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<sup>1</sup> The 25th annual MIE conference has been postponed due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that the emergence of COVID-19 as a new phenomenon adversely impacting IE agents has triggered this and a couple of earlier editorial articles in the journal (see Etemad 2021, Etemad 2020a, 2020b and 2020c).

<sup>3</sup> On March 22, 2021, the WHO announced COVID-19 as a global pandemic after rapid infections in the city of Wuhan, China.

fields; and international entrepreneurship is not an exception. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is primarily a biological phenomenon striking people in nation after nation and causing large mortalities (3.7 million deaths as of this writing), it has also caused massive damages financially, economically, and even socio-culturally, in many nations and organizations worldwide, including SMEs and iSMEs due to the rapid unfolding of the unexpected global crisis. This article is, therefore, focused on understanding how and why the pandemic adversely impacted a large number of active iSMEs worldwide and what the IE scholarly community and the Journal of International Entrepreneurship need to undertake a new path to avert and possibly minimize if not avoid similar damages in the near future and beyond.

**Aims and objective of this issue** As discussed earlier, the overall aim of the journal is to help advance the frontier of IE scholarship. Achieving this aim has benefited from the valuable lessons of careful scanning the environment for pointing to and identifying overall needs for addressing newly appearing or contemporary issues, events, or phenomenon with impact on the field. The COVID-19 pandemic has confronted SMEs, iSMEs, and the IE scholarly community with difficulties and problems. Accordingly, this issue's main aim to point out a sample of those difficulties and advocate for solving them.

*Structurally*, this article will consist of four parts. Further developments will be presented in part two, following this brief introduction. The highlights of the four comprehensive literature review and an advancing frontier article would be presented in the third part. Conclusion and learned lessons will appear in the last part.

## Further developments

The rapid transmission of the coronavirus, from one country to another and one local region to another, forced the WHO to announce the COVID-19 as a global pandemic, which in turn called upon national governments to rapidly enact protective and defensive but restrictive, actions to minimize damages and control further transmission of the virus. These restrictions reduced and nearly reversed (Bown 2020) many decades of international liberalization after the Second World War, resulting in a "borderless world" (Ohmea 1990), "globalization" and flattening of barriers (Friedman 2000), and quest for increased "global competitiveness" (Porter 1985), paving the road for aspiring SMEs to further grow through internationalization. As it is a public knowledge now, even after a year from the WHO's announcement on March 22nd, 2020, most of the world is still suffering from the unintended consequences (Heiland and Ulltveit-Moe 2020) of the policy responses to COVID-19 (Elgin et al. 2020), in terms of (a) national protectionism and discrimination (Evenett 2019), (b) restriction on transportation and trade (Heiland and Ulltveit-Moe 2020), and (c) overall transformation in the direction of de-globalization (Seric and Winkler 2020, Altman 2020, Irwin 2020 and Kobrin 2020) and re-centralization of

activities and controls (Veglio and Romanello 2021) of previously de-centralized activities.

In other words, the COVID-19's damages have not only inflicted the humanity and the various people in different countries but also firm of all sizes have been deeply and adversely affected in a variety of ways, including rapid and reactive government policies. However, such adverse impacts were not solely because of the virus but also due to a combination of national governments' rapidly enacted policy actions for protecting their respective populations and institutions, combined with *under preparedness, if not unpreparedness, of most institutions not suspecting the rapid unfolding of changes* in their respective environments and thus had no time to initiate remedial counter strategic actions.

The national governments' defensive and protective actions included total lockdowns, restricting movements across regions, and international immobility due to the closure of borders along with an implicit use of nationalism in terms of restricting exports of vital parts and equipment necessary for health-care system to help COVID-19-infected people of their own, mostly in intensive care units (ICUs), which in turn negatively affected importing countries on the other side. Undoubtedly, the historians will find the "trade collapse of 2020" (Javorcik 2020; Bown and Irwin 2019) similar to the thy neighbor restrictive policies of 1929 to 1933, which caused the Great Depression of the twentieth century. Similarly, the "great trade collapse of 2021" added to the darkness of the COVID-19 crisis, from which we need to learn deeply and significantly.

Organizations such as SMEs and iSMEs found themselves defenselessly on the receiving side of such policies and their consequences. However, the main factor behind the negative impact on SMEs and iSMEs was mainly due to the local lockdowns restricting in-person interactions and the consequent shutdown of many small firms due to local disconnectedness (Lorenzen et al. 2020), especially in services, as potential customers could not move to receive services or provide services. Similarly, the situation in manufacturing firms was also negatively affected due to the near collapse of the international outsourcing, logistics, and international transportation, partly because of the closure of borders to avoid the coronavirus traveling from infected regions to the others and partly due of nationalistic and protectionist practices (Kilic and Marin 2020).

Another notable aspect that contributed do the economic and financial crisis, especially in a smaller and younger firms, was their lack of experience and preparedness for such an unexpected, impactful, and rapidly developing crisis. The iSMEs were also badly affected as their international supply chains collapsed. Most of such firms had heavily relied on outsourcing from highly efficient, reliable, and low-cost international sources (i.e., inward internationalization) to help them become competitive at home (Welch and Luostarinen 1988), which in turn allowed them to aspire to further internationalize (i.e., forward internationalization) and seek growth in diverse international markets *to learn internationally and diversify their risks*. The concept of learning experientially has been one of the foundations of early internationalization theories (Johanson and Vahlne 2009, 2003, 1977), which remains valuable as it adds to the accumulated knowledge of the firms and others involved. From that perspective, learning from prior minor

and major crisis could have provided a baseline for the early stages of managing an unfolding crisis.

**Learning from post-crises** Although a crisis of COVID-19 magnitude had not been experienced in the modern era, the experience and consequences of the other relatively recent financial and economic crisis—i.e., the 2007–2009 global financial crisis (GFC), are still vivid, well documented, and should have been experientially and instructionally helpful.<sup>4</sup> The GFC started in the USA with the cost of some \$1400 billion to the US government alone to save financial institutions in the USA; but other parts of the financial systems were not spared, as GFC expanded globally.

Similarly, the Asian financial crisis (AFC) of 1997–1998 reached far beyond the large firms and affected the smaller and younger local firms and iSMEs, more severely than others.<sup>5</sup> Generally, SMEs' constrained capabilities and resources do not provide these firms much tolerance and make them more vulnerable to crises, which can contribute to their demise much earlier and faster than others. Similar to AFC's initial financial and economic disturbances triggering others, there have been numerous similar experiences, mostly on the biological side that caused significant public health problems and consequent negative economic impacts over time in the near past. Most of these crises were localized and did not affect everyone the same way nor were they as wide-spread as the economic ones. Consider some of the followings from which everyone should have learned to help the early stages of the COVID-19:

The *HIV/aids epidemic of the 1990s to the early 2000s* killed between 1.2 and 2.4 million people in 2004, while its mortalities have been decreasing continually (e.g., 1.1 million in 2010 and about 690,000 people in 2019 (<https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/fact-sheet> — retrieved in May 2021). Ebola started in 1976 in Zaire killing more than 11,000 deaths in three African countries (i.e., Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia) alone (*source* WHO Archives at <https://web.archive.org/web/20141214011751> and <https://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en/> — retrieved in May 2021). Similarly, SARS — a coronavirus (COV2) of 2002 to 2004, originated from China and killed close to 1000 people (*source*: [https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-deadly-is-the-coronavirus-compared-to-past-outbreaks#20022004-severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome-\(SARS\)](https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-deadly-is-the-coronavirus-compared-to-past-outbreaks#20022004-severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome-(SARS))) (retrieved in May 2021). Finally, the *NIH1 pandemic of 2009 killed more than 284,000* (*source* <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2012/06/cdc-estimate-global-h1n1-pandemic-deaths-284000> and [https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-deadly-is-the-coronavirus-compared-to-past-outbreaks#20022004-severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome-\(SARS\)](https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-deadly-is-the-coronavirus-compared-to-past-outbreaks#20022004-severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome-(SARS))) (retrieved in May 2021).

<sup>4</sup> For comparative characteristics and approximate dates of significant global epidemics and pandemics in twentieth century and the new millennia, see [https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-deadly-is-the-coronavirus-compared-to-past-outbreaks#20022004-severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome-\(SARS\)](https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-deadly-is-the-coronavirus-compared-to-past-outbreaks#20022004-severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome-(SARS)) (retrieved in May 2021).

<sup>5</sup> The South Asian governments responded to the 2007–2008 global financial crisis quickly and much more rapidly and resolutely to the COVID-19 crisis based on learning from 1997 to 1998 Asian financial crisis (AFC) followed by the 2007–2008 global financial crisis (GFC).

Although the memories of most of the above crises may have faded in our memories, they could have served as critical incidents, from which *we could have collectively learned significant lessons* in order to enact potent and protective strategies to avoid similar crises in early stages, in December 2019 and early days of 2020 to reduce the devastating impact of COVID-19 crisis. The world collective learning from ad hoc experimentation in those early days to avoid mortalities *has been the largest live experimentation with human lives and the socio-economic well beings worldwide*. Theoretically, we should have avoided that scale of experimentations and even smaller ones in the future. Therefore, the logical question is *what should we have learned from similar incidents?* Answer(s) is not yet clear as many involved authorities, managements and institutions acted on an ad hoc basis, and the post-COVID-19 analysis will integrate our collective learnings.

Theoretically and from a learning perspective, the SARS epidemic (2002 to 2004), which nearly spread worldwide, was associated with another coronavirus (COV-2) that was sharing certain biological similarities with the 2019 coronavirus; but the novel coronavirus of 2019 has had a much higher transmissibility and caused more massive mortalities than SARS. However, health authorities did not ban international travel, especially from the infected areas for nearly 4 months allowing infections from one region to indiscriminately infect other regions and countries one after another through the travel of the infected people.

Ironically, the banning of international travel and an immediate and strict quarantine of international travelers, which could have stopped the virus' transmission from one region to another, were not enacted by the Canadian government for a few months after the lockdown on March 22nd, 2021, which was more than 100 day past the WHO's announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Proposing a hypothesis** Logically, one has to accept the hypothesis that those in charge of dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, including the firms' executive and managers', *either did not expect the crisis nor had learned valuable knowledge from the past experiences* (e.g., GFC of 2007–2009, AFC of 1997–1998 on the financial side and at least from the SARS 2002–2004 on the biological side) and were not prepared to deal with the economic, financial, and health-care aspects off the COVID-19 crisis immediately to avoid *the largest live and ongoing worldwide public health experimentation that is still ongoing with no clear end in sight*. However, the near closure of many highly efficient SMEs, and possible demise of some of them, also suggest that they were not fully prepared for dealing with the emerging COVID-19 crisis either, and its rapidly unfolding did not allow for time to learn and act adequately. Accordingly and in light of the COVID-19 global crisis, the overriding theme behind the brief highlighting of the next five article included in this, and appearing in the next part, is whether there were any hint or *early warning signals* to IE operating institutions, including SMEs and iSMEs, to learn from the past, or contemporary, event, in order to prepare for the future.

In summary, *the question before us all, therefore, is why efficient SMEs, and especially successfully internationalized SMS (iSMEs), did not have contingency plans and were underprepared for dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. Similarly, and more importantly, another related question before us all is whether the IE research,*

lessons, teachings, and trainings of managers and executives had at least signaled, and possibly prepared, SMEs and iSMEs to properly prepare them for dealing with the economic and socio-cultural of a crisis such as the COVID-19, regardless of the timing of its occurrence.

Stated differently, the main question for the next part is whether IE the scholarship had suspected and provided the early warning signals to executives, managers, and others to plan and prepare for a probable rapidly unfolding crisis not allowing time for the implementation of a prudent strategy to avert and possibly avoid the crisis.

## The brief highlight of articles contained in this issue

The four literature reviews and, an advancing frontier, articles selected for inclusion in this issue collectively reflect the rapidly expanding field, its branching out for further specialization, and yet with a remarkable inner-consistency and coherence within the rapidly developing IE field. However, it is critically important to reiterate that all of the articles selected for this issue of the journal were submitted long before the COVID-19 global crisis and were peer reviewed, revised, and published online before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019–2020.

The second article included in this issue is entitled as *Internationalization of SMEs: a systematic review of 20 years of research* and is co-authored by Vivian Peuker Sardon Steinhäuser, Fábio de Oliveira Paula, and Teresia Diana Lewe van Aduard de Macedo-Soares. As the title indicates, this article is a literature review of 20 years of scholarly research in the internationalization of SMEs, which covers some 669 cutting-edge published articles over a period of 20 years, from 1998 to 2017, listed in the Scopus data bases. It truly captures the evolutionary trends of research in IE and documents two important developments in that span of time: (i) the numbers of published article have increased significantly, and (ii) the Journal of International Entrepreneurship has published more IE-oriented articles than any other prominent journal.

The authors formulated three research questions to guide their path of research regarding IE literature's evolutionary trend lines, and allow for their recommendations as follows:

- i) *What themes have been considered relevant to the literature on the internationalization of SMEs in the 20-year period from 1998 to 2017?*
- ii) *What is the state-of-the-art in the literature on the internationalization of SMEs?*
- iii) *What gaps still exists in the literature that could be opportunities for future research in the field?*

In order to develop an in-depth understanding and documenting the true evolutionary characteristics of the field, the authors divided the span of time into four 5-year sub-periods (1998–2002, 2003–2007, 2008–2012, and 2013–2017) before

using bibliometric, bibliography, and bibliographic coupling methodologies elaborately to analyze the literature in terms of research themes, authors, journal, and countries over the period. Three research thematic topics — i.e., *antecedents, patterns, and the outcomes of SME internationalization* — persisted over time with alternating importance; but all were reinforced in the last 5 year's sub-period. Their elaborate analysis also resulted in proposing a conceptual framework of SMEs' internationalization with three main thematic components — i.e. the *antecedents of SMEs' internationalization, the patterns of SMEs' internationalization, and the outcomes of SMEs' internationalization* (see Fig. 6 of the article). The authors also classified article into three thematic types: (i) type A, entrepreneurial internationalization; type B, international comparisons of entrepreneurship; and type C, comparative entrepreneurial internationalization.

Regarding comprehensive or an overall summations for each of the above research questions, especially the third one *related to the gap in the literature over the 20-year*, excellent analysis-based suggestions were put forward; but even a hint at crisis management was not suggested. It seems that the relative stability of the environment, especially in the advanced countries, where most of the articles had originated, the planning and preparation for dealing with a potentially disruptive event, such as the COVID-19, was not expected or envisioned (we will further return to this topic in the next part — Discussions and Learned lessons).

The third article included in this issue is entitled as *Corporate entrepreneurship, its antecedents, process, and consequences: A systematic review and suggestion for future research* and is co-authored by *Homa Pirhadi* and *Alireza Feyzbakhsh*. This comprehensive literature review article explores the topic of intrapreneurship or corporate entrepreneurship (CE) in the boundaries of corporations, within which entrepreneurial initiative is undertaken. This topic is an important area of entrepreneurial studies that has been gaining increasing importance over time, and it complements and extends the previous article very well. As articulated in its title, the article provides a near mirror image of the previous article as it also identifies three important components of corporate entrepreneurship.

Similar to the previous literature review article, this literature review article identified some 336 research articles published in seven prominent journals on corporate issues or corporate entrepreneurship. The authors' statistical analysis suggested that CE literature may fall in three main categories, namely, "antecedents," "process(es)," and "consequences" (or "outcomes" in the previous article), where (a) the *antecedents* initiate or trigger the CE initiative within a corporation; (b) specified processes pave the road to achieve objective; and (c) attain the expected consequences, which should be the desired outcomes. Methodologically, each of the three aspects was further broken down and analyzed at the individual, organizational, and environmental levels. Moreover, the authors' analysis proceeded to identify pivotal concept in the key articles to present a realistic portrayal of the field.

This study started with the following seven clear research questions:

- i) What is the CE concept?
- ii) How it is developed during the years?
- iii) What is the difference between CE and IE?



- iv) How CE studies can contribute to IE?
- v) What is the process of CE?
- vi) Which parts of CE process(es) are studied? And,
- vii) *Which parts have received relatively less attention?*

The last research question addresses the important question of what has received less attention, especially in the “CE process” once the antecedents “triggers” the outcome(s). Again, it seems that a relative inner-corporate tranquility reflecting the nearly stable external environment in the past two decades had excluded planning and preparations for the rainy days, which resulted in massive unexpected losses in the aftermath of COVID-19 crisis. However, the more capable, resourceful, and innovative corporations identified relevant opportunities and quickly reconfigured their resources to support corporate processes for exploiting opportunities to further benefit and thrive (for further information and a sample of SMEs benefiting from the COVID-19 opportunities, see Etemad [2020a](#), [2020b](#), [2020c](#) and [2021](#)).

The fourth article included in this issue is entitled as *International social ventures: A literature review and guidance for future research* and is co-authored by *Nathalie N. Larsen* and *Martin Hannibal*. The authors of this literature review paper acknowledge the rapid growth of the field from the publication of the early pivotal article introducing INVs and suggest that a specialized branch of the field focused on *international ventures with social impact as their core value system* (ISVs) are also developing rapidly. This article’s objectives are twofold: (i) to present a literature review of extant ISV literature and (ii) to propose five propositions in close relations to each of the essential elements of ISVs based on the structure of INVs and the lessons of their literature review.

As discussed earlier, these are institutions with hybrid objectives, where the delivery of social value forms their core logic, and it is combined with the economic logic of the traditional firms. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that heightened the importance of social services, the recognition of socially oriented institution, where some of them had taken up the challenges of providing the necessary and highly desired social service to reduce the negative impact of the pandemic crisis, deserve full scholarly attention. The example of Medicines San Frontier (MSF) is an institution that delivers health-care services in various stressful and difficult conditions to people who need them where the national and local institutions could not deliver them due to many reason, including lack of funds, expertise, and infrastructural support as well as local hostilities (see Etemad ([2021](#))and Servantie et al. ([2021](#)) for a discussion and sample case studies of such successful organization that are also called B Corporations).

Complementing the above two literature reviews, this article reviews the state-of-the art in international social enterprises (ISEs) and ISVs as rapidly developing and highly specialized INVs. Also similar to the previous two literature reviews, this article provides a baseline for future studies in the newly emerging phenomenon of ISEs and ISVs branching out of international entrepreneurship-oriented firms (iSMEs) similar to international entrepreneurship branching out of the international business (IB) three decades ago to focus on, and also further

explore, the important, and special, characteristics of iSMEs that did not adhere to the economic logic(s) of the larger firms, such as MNEs, and could not be thoroughly discussed within IB.

Similarly, the authors suggest that there are a large set of opportunities and new avenues for research, such as philanthropic capital and impact investments in establishing ISEs, which are not equally available to general IE-oriented firms and applicable to what they would routinely do. The example of Medicine San Frontier (or Medicine Without Borders), with an annual budget of close to \$2 billion and 40,000 employees that are all supported by small donations worldwide and assisted by a few financial philanthropic institutions and a handful of national governments, including Canada, France, and Switzerland, provide an important and vivid case of a highly focussed ISE.

Importantly, *these unexplored opportunities are the existing gap that are not fully bridged over* and are in need of further exploration and coverage. Such a coverage will inevitably address contingency plans and prior preparations for events not occurring frequently and routinely, such as the COVID-19, which would prepare ISEs to benefit from an environmental difficulty, when, for example, the national and local health-care institutions were overwhelmed with patients infected with the coronavirus, even in the industrialized and advanced nations.

The fifth article included in this issue is entitled as *A review of methodological diversity within the domain of international entrepreneurship* and is co-authored by *Farhad Uddin Ahmed* and *Louis Brennan*. This literature review of methodologies in IE complements and adds to the previous three literature review articles, as it focuses on the ontological aspects of methodology beyond the crude categories of qualitative and quantitative approaches. This review identified 158 articles published in a span of 20 years from 1997 to 2017. It reports on the evolutionary trend in the methodological aspects of IE research articles. It reports that the IE literature has become a distinct body of knowledge; *but a few gaps still remain*. It also found a dominance of authors and research originating from advanced countries, while developing and emerging countries were not covered as deeply.

In light of the fact that the socio-cultural and economical aspects are different in developing and emerging environments, their operating procedures could also differ from those of others. This is a wide gap in the body of IE knowledge, and the *IE scholars and practitioners could learn valuable lessons from the rich diversity of emerging and developing countries* and contribute to more effective management of iSMEs in different environments.

Similarly, it reports on another gap relating to a predominance of research on entrepreneurial internationalization initiatives of technology and intensively knowledge-based firms. Given the preponderance of many other international ventures, beyond technology and knowledge-intensive endeavors, the learned lessons, practical experience, and the related knowledge could, therefore, be missing in the overall body of IE knowledge, which is another significant gap capable of offering rich opportunities for learning more and enriching both theoretical and practical aspects of IE knowledge and management.

The authors also report on the evolution and improvements of methodologies in later publications beyond 2011. The authors attributed such improvements to the

recommendation of earlier researchers. This is a significant finding that *adds to the importance of advancing recommendations for improvements* based on the lessons and shortcomings learned from an ongoing research, which would be difficult to replicate or to correct; but such recommendations to others can potentially avoid them in the future research and thus improve upon the quality of research and reliability of findings later on. Another reported shortcoming is the concentration of IE publications in mainstream IB and marketing journals, which limit the reach of IE research to scholars of related fields, and would potentially restrict them to the field of those journals and deprive them from relating to, learning from, and possibly contributing to enriching the distinct and growing body of IE knowledge. On the other side of the ledger, IE scholars would be equally deprived if they do not read other complementary journals beyond their own field's mainstream publications.

The sixth article included in this issue is entitled as *The International ECOpreneurship: Environmental commitment and international partner selection of Finnish firms from the energy sector* and is authored by *Tamara Galkina*. Similar to previous literature review article, this research points to the recent and ongoing developments in another important branch of International Entrepreneurships literature, namely, the ecosystem entrepreneurship or ECOpreneurship for short. As the ecopreneurship's orientation is closer to social entrepreneurship and B Corporation (discussed earlier) than the traditional entrepreneurial firms, this article complements the previous literature review of international social enterprises (ISEs). Therefore, this article also extends the discussion of ISEs and international social venture (ISV), covered by the previous literature review article on ISVs.

Although ecosystem is global concerns of all, it has not attracted its disserving attention and importance. Similarly, entrepreneurial internationalization of environmentally committed firms has not attracted significant attention. Consider, for example, that the global success of ecopreneurial initiatives depends heavily on local partners around the globe, and partner selection with adequate expertise, capabilities, commitments, and interest has proven to be challenging and *it remains as another gap in the IE literature*. The case study research supporting this article suggests that partner selection, as a foundation for effective and functional network formation, needs to be broader than the traditional selection criteria and also needs to concentrate on the necessary tasks in order to bridge the existing gaps by building both the local and international requirements and capabilities. The foundations supporting such bridging may require much planning, investment, and preparations, as the basic building materials, including private and public support, for constructing such fundamental bridges over the troubling waters of the environment may not readily exist and the bridge builder may face much difficulty and resistance.

## Conclusions and learned lessons

This part consists of two components. The conclusion part highlights the significant reported finding of the earlier parts. In contrast, the learned lesson parts look into the prevailing and near future developments and advocate for the learning from the past, where there has been much experience and accumulated knowledge

that should have been captured to avert, and possibly avoid, the massive damages caused by the COVID-19 global crisis inflicting massive damages on many firms, especially on iSMEs very rapidly in a short span of time.

**Discussions** As evidence of the field's impressive advances, and the contribution of the journal to those developments, it is pleasing for the journal to have placed five cutting-edge articles — *four comprehensive literature reviews* and one research-based articles at the frontiers of Eco-entrepreneurship (or ecopreneurship) — in this Springer issue, which is identifying numerous new issues and is exploring them in considerable depth. All of the five articles were submitted to the journal much before the COVID-19 crisis and were subjected to the journal's routinely rigorous double blind multiple peer reviews and revisions that at times consume some time.

Collectively, the above five research-based articles reflected the impressive current state of IE at this juncture of the field's evolutionary path up to now. Each of the literature review articles covered a large number of articles in international entrepreneurship, ranging from 158 to 668, *which are clear indications, and the assurance that the field has evolved rapidly, enriched itself substantively, and the Journal of International Entrepreneurship has played a significant role in achieving that progress over the past two to three decades of IE's young life up to now.* They also provide a clear evidence of how the field has evolved and matured rapidly over the past two to three decades. They also document that JIEN has contributed to that rapid evolution and has achieved prominence with publication of impactful article and assisted in consolidating the direction of the field.

The thorough literature review articles portrayed the evolutionary trends of published research in IE over a 20-year span of time. They have also documented that (i) the numbers of published article have consistency (except for a few very short periods) increased significantly, (ii) the Journal of International Entrepreneurship has published more IE articles than any other prominent journal, (iii) the IE authors in the later periods of research have taken the recommendation of earlier publications to use more comprehensive methodologies to arrive at more reliable findings, (iv) the field of IE has developed a distinct character of its own, and (v) the field is branching into subfields that are enriching the overall field by their focused specialization. These findings provide a substantive evidence that the field has developed its own foundations capable of attracting and supporting the further developments of its expanding branches, or subfields, that can better address the specific issue of that subfield.

**The learned lessons** As discussed earlier, similar to its three predecessor issues in 2020 and 2021, this article has been influenced by the rapid unfolding of the global pandemic crisis, which resulted in focusing on the better understanding of how and why the pandemic so deeply and negatively affected a large number of active iSMEs worldwide and what the journal and the IE scholarly community could have done to help reduce the negative impact. Although those issues are somewhat behind us now, this retrospective and critical assessment of the field's developments explores some thoughts as to how such damages can be avoided in the near future and beyond. That

perspective was motivated by the reported findings (in the literature review of IE methodologies) that more recent publications had indirectly learned from the past by following the recommendations of prior and earlier publications and used more solid methodologies. In a sense, such recommendations advanced valuable experiential learning to the other scholars, which helped them avoid deploying similar methodologies and procedures, on which their respective scholars could not improve for variety reasons. These are analogous to SMEs' experience in the early days of COVID-19; but their experience can form the basis for improvements through studying and learning from them for probable future occurrences. Retrospectively, the weak, if non-existing, prior preparations made it nearly impossible for unsuspecting firms (and even governments) to deal with the COVID-19 damages properly and in timely fashion as they were not adequately prepared and had to start from scratch. However, the lessons of the early days, especially fatal mistakes, can pave the road for better readiness for the next probable crisis, regardless of its magnitude and timing, could have reduced the intensity and magnitude of those born damages.

The second part of this article, entitled Further Developments, presented an argument regarding a dire need for systematic documentation and learning from relevant experiences of past crises for developing plans and formulating potent strategies capable of averting, and possibly minimizing, if not avoiding, similar damages in the near future and beyond. Such *learning depends on openness to studying past experiences, and learning from them, in order to better prepare for the future*. This suggestion extends beyond individual firms' needs and into public policy formulation in collaboration with the specific needs of focal industries to guide firms' own preparation and innovative plans and strategies in a timely fashion. The lack of time pressure would even suggest a prior simulation of plans and strategies to improve upon their effectiveness. In a popular parlance, already prepared and ready plans can be "taken off the shelves" and implemented without loss of critically valuable time, especially when a crisis emerges rapidly and unfolds quickly.

In the final analysis, and based on the emergence of similar coronaviruses in the past (e.g., the COV-2 of SARS), the reappearance probability of the next coronavirus has increased, and the need for addressing how to deal with such emerging crises in the near future has assumed much higher importance. Consequently, the journal invites scholars to submit research-based article or proposes special issue(s) on important topics, such as how iSME can prepare to manage emerging or unfolding crises more effectively and efficiently. An email to the editor-in-chief briefly describing the topic and tentative plans for the special issue will suffice.

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